

GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT IN EL SALVADOR

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss grassroots development as portrayed in the development literature and use my findings to evaluate three local rural programmes in a poor, remote area of El Salvador, Central America. I set the context by briefly examining and comparing two approaches to development, namely, the paradigm of things and that of people. I also provide moral justifications for the latter paradigm and trace its history as an idea.

I then discuss in detail the three central tenets of grassroots development, participation/collective action, social organization and empowerment. Throughout this process local people are the main actors; they are the ones who participate together to form a grassroots organization in order to empower themselves and take more control over their lives. Indicators for the three pillars of grassroots development are used to evaluate the three case studies.

The cases are all in a poor department in northeastern El Salvador; the participants are subsistence cultivators or artisans. In all three areas local people worked together with varying results. The local development association scored better overall when rated subjectively than did the two coffee co-operatives but the co-op members' well-being were enhanced more through group activities. All participants appeared to be taking more control of their lives.

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I believe many Latin Americans thrive on making visitors feel welcome!

INTRODUCTION

In Section One, I examine two main paradigms of development, that of things (mainstream development) and that of people (grassroots development or GRD). Using a table, I briefly compare these two; the 'mainstream' or 'paradigm of things' is characterized as a top-down ideology of development whereas GRD or the 'paradigm of people' is a bottom-up approach. I then detail justifications for the use of GRD and the history of the idea of development in which the participation of the locals is critical.

In Section Two, I portray GRD as a process, a process in which the participants are the core with the main goal being their increased control over their own lives. In order for this goal to be realized as completely as possible, the development must be built on a foundation of the participants' culture and fully involve women. The three main pillars of GRD are intertwined in the process; they are participation/collective action, social organization and empowerment. Simply put, locals, by participating together with a common goal build a grassroots organization and empower themselves. Participation and collective action are discussed in general as well as specifically in terms of the commitment of locals to the process as evidenced by pooling of resources, the involvement of external catalysts or not and the nature of the participants.

Grassroots organizations (GROs) are the next subject; some of these are based on traditional structures while others are created specifically for development work. The three types of GROs are local development associations, interest associations and co-operatives; their usual memberships,

functions and differences are described. Two key aspects of GROs are their capacities to act internally and externally. The former refers to self-help or group management of the organization while the latter means the ability to make claims on external bodies such as governments, banks, etc.

In the last part of Section Two, empowerment is examined.

Empowerment is both the process and the goal of GRD; participants are empowered by working together and they gain more control of their lives as a result of their GRD labours. Indicators of empowerment discussed are self-reliance, collective decision-making and action, social awareness, skills development, vertical and horizontal links and enhanced well-being or human flourishing. A graphical representation of the GRD concludes Section Two.

In Section Three, I evaluate three cases in El Salvador. My evaluations are based on a short visit to the area in October 1999; I only had a few days for each case. My judgments are of a subjective nature as I relied on interviews with participants and other available locals. Using ten indicators in total for the three pillars of GRD, I rated the cases using a simple four point scale. Overall the traditionally-based local development association scored somewhat higher than the two co-operatives but all three received the highest level for three indicators, one for each of the three key elements of GRD. I discuss the score patterns and possible reasons for them and then provide some conclusions as well as some suggestions for GRD in El Salvador and elsewhere. My conclusion is that grassroots development has taken place in each of the three cases as demonstrated by the fact that participants are taking more control over their lives.

SECTION ONE: GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT.... ITS BACKGROUND

Development was---and continues to take for the most part---a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of "progress". Development was conceived not as a cultural process (culture was a residual variable, to disappear with the advance of modernization) but instead as a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some "badly needed" goods to a "target" population. It comes as no surprise that development became a force so destructive to Third World cultures, ironically in the name of people's interest.

Development was a response to the problematization of poverty that took place in the years following World War II and not a natural process of knowledge that gradually uncovered problems and dealt with them: as such, it must be seen as a historical construct that provides a space in which poor countries are known, specified, and intervened upon. (Escobar, 1995, 44-45)

In this section, in order to provide the context for an in-depth discussion of grassroots development, I will briefly describe two paradigms or approaches to development. These are the 'paradigm of things' or 'mainstream development' as characterized by Escobar in the quotation above and the 'paradigm of people', that is, grassroots development. I will also compare the two ideologies of development, provide moral justifications for GRD as well as a history of the concept.

(i) The 'Paradigm of Things'....Mainstream Development

Using 'paradigm' to "mean a pattern of ideas, and values, methods behaviour which fit together and are mutually reinforcing", Chambers (1995: 32) found that the dominant paradigm of development in the 1950s and 1960s was one of 'things'. This way of 'doing development' stressed big infrastructure, industrialization and irrigation works. "The idea that development consists of a

transfer of skills or information creates a role for the expert as the only person capable of mediating the transfer of these skills from one person or society to another”(Edwards 1989, 118). But as Edwards (1989) noted, in all areas of development, the appropriation of problem solving approaches are vastly more critical than the ingestion of technical information. Interwoven with this emphasis on technology transfer is the extensive use of projects (as opposed to programs) and the blueprint approach.

The usual *modus operandi* was top-down; the main goal was to hasten a country's economic growth with the expectation that gains made would trickle down to the impoverished masses. Unfortunately, even though there was rapid growth in many southern countries in the period from 1950 to 1970, broad-based development did not occur; little prosperity trickled down to the poorest who needed it the most (Brohman 1996).

Strategies, apart from large economic schemes, promoted by mainstream development in the early development decades included co-operatives, community development and projects. These were not as 'thing'- or technology-based as those noted above but, in the manner in which they were implemented, have commonalities with the techno-projects. Co-operatives were frequently top-down in that they were often created by governments to promote government policies and control markets rather than increase collective market power (Korten, 1980). Community development programs, in ways similar to large projects, often accepted the existing power structures in villages and utilized conventional bureaucratic structures to implement work with little real

participation of the local population. Also, the programs did little to build community controlled organizations to further their members' needs. Projects usually involved a rigid blueprint model that obviated substantial local input. Unfortunately as Sithembiso Nyoni, the Director of the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress in Zimbabwe observed, no country in the world has ever developed through projects (from a speech to OXFAM, Oxford, 1985, referenced by Edwards 1989, 119). Lecomte (1986, 144) concluded that "project aid, though a convenient tool for the actors at the front of the stage, is a straitjacket for the final beneficiaries and can well jeopardize the chances of people-dependent activities"¹.

The desires of the people to be 'developed' are usually not considered by top-down development programs. Nor is the role of emotion. Emotion is subjective but people usually only commit their time and energy for issues about which they have strong feelings (Brohman 1996; Edwards 1989).

After half a century of mainstream top-down development utilizing the 'paradigm of things', the United Nations Development Programme (1997) estimated that 1.3 billion people still survive on less than \$US1 a day²; furthermore, almost a billion people are illiterate, more than that number do not have access to safe water and 840 million endure hunger or face food insecurity. Mainstream development has, to a large degree, seen southerners as objects rather than subjects of a process largely focused on economics (United Nations

¹ But sometimes GROs can use the NGO project structure to their advantage as long as they control the content of the project and do not fall into dependency on the NGO.

² According to World Bank president James Wolfensohn, two billion people exist on less than \$US 2 per day (CBC radio news broadcast, April 13, 2000).

Development Programme 1999; Rahman 1993; Veltmeyer 1997). The “underdeveloped” of the South have been “developed”, “economically developed”, “developmentally assisted”, “developmentally planned” and “developmentally aided” with less than the expected effect on their poverty and levels of inequality. Therefore, to a considerable degree, mainstream, thing-oriented development since the late 1940s, has failed to assist many southerners in solving their problems; through the eyes of many writers, development has actually been destructive (for example, Escobar 1995, quoted above; Isbister 1995; Goulet 1989).

(ii) The Paradigm of People... Grassroots Development

Although the paradigm of things based on economic analysis continues to dominate development practice, the paradigm of people is becoming more influential and as Chambers (1995:33) found “the rhetoric of development now widely favours putting people first, and often, putting poor people first of all”.

Empowerment... Participation... Participatory Development... Grassroots Development... Development from Within... People’s Self-Development... Alternative Development ...

All of the above have in common as their central tenet what mainstream development lacks: local participants as the key actors. Grassroots development (GRD) is an approach that encourages “local people to become the subject, not the object, of development strategies” (Taylor 1992:257)³. The paradigm of

³ Although writers use various labels for development that places the participants at the centre of the process, I find that participatory development, development from within, people’s self-development, alternative development and grassroots development are all about the same process with slightly different emphasis; I arbitrarily use grassroots development in this paper.

people is aptly named for it centres development on the participants in development. As a process it can be characterized as bottom-up. This means locals together determine the nature, direction, scope and results of their grassroots undertaking. Clark (1991:22) observed "true development is done by people not to people" (emphasis in original). Burkey (1993:205) summarized the GRD approach, which he termed participatory development:

Self-reliant participatory development is an educational and empowering process in which people, in partnership with each other and with those able to assist them, identify problems and needs, mobilize resources, and assume responsibility themselves to plan, manage, control and assess the individual and collective actions that they themselves decide upon.

The core of grassroots development is the process whereby local impoverished people empower themselves by participating through organized collective action. These are the three pillars of the paradigm of people: participation/collective action, social organization and empowerment. Viswanath (1991:5) succinctly sums up the essence of people-centred or grassroots development with these words: "the increase in the capacity of disadvantaged individuals to take control of their lives".

Of interest is the difference in the relationship of new paradigms to the old ones in the physical sciences and development. In the former a new paradigm replaces the old one as Kuhn (1970:102) observes "...the transition from Newtonian to Einsteinian mechanics illustrates with particular clarity the scientific revolution as a displacement of the conceptual network through which scientists view the world". Chambers (1995:32) finds that a new development paradigm

does not replace a previous one but tends to “coexist, overlap, coalesce and separate”.

Although the paradigm of people is necessary for locals to control their development, the paradigm of things is still required for large technically demanding pieces. As Uphoff (1992) suggested, development needs to be ‘both-and’ rather than ‘either-or’. Therefore GRD is not replacing mainstream development for structures such as bridges. But what about local development? According to Chambers (1995), the paradigm of things still rules the roost. Its continued domination is largely due to the nature of the GRD process – people empower themselves by participating collectively. This empowerment of local participants threatens those who have power already for their control from the centre is diluted and local diversity intensifies.

Table 1 highlights some of the major differences between two development paradigms, that of things and people.

Table 1: Two Development Paradigms Compared, Social and Political Aspects

(loosely adapted from Chambers 1995:32)

REFERENCE	PARADIGM OF THINGS	PARADIGM OF PEOPLE
Planning and action	Top-down	Bottom-up
Key word	Planning	Participation
Decision-making	Centralized	Decentralized
Focus of power	External: government; international, national or regional non-governmental organization	Local grassroots organization
Locals seen as	Beneficiaries	Actors, partners
Outsiders' interaction with locals	Motivating, controlling	Enabling, empowering
Impetus to action	External	Internal or internal plus catalysts
Methods, rules	Standardized, universal	Diverse, local
Goals	Pre-set, closed, set by external players	Evolving, open, set by participants
Mode	Blueprint	Process

Most of the features of the two paradigms noted above have been referred to in the previous text; elements of the people approach will be discussed in detail in Section Two.

(iii) Moral Justification for Grassroots Development

Friedmann (1992:9) asserts that like the mainstream doctrine, "alternative development is not primarily a set of technical prescriptions but an ideology. As such, it has a certain moral coherence". This vision questions growth-maximizing development and works toward a just correction of the current power distributions be they social, economic or political. As alternative development focuses on people it faces mainstream development as its dialectical counterpart. As

Friedmann (1992:9) noted: "actual development will always be the historical outcome of the ideological and political conflicts between them".

The same author (1992) contends that there are three reasons why alternative or grassroots development is important enough to be pursued. They are human rights, citizen rights and what Friedmann calls "human flourishing". The first is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UHHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. The UDHR identifies civil and political rights as well as economic and social rights. Nations such as the USA have promoted the first group of rights over the latter; Friedmann (1992) notes some authorities have argued that the latter are as fundamental as the former. Article 25.1 of UDHR reads:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (Donnelly 1998, 168, appendix)

There are obvious problems in defining "standard of living" and "security" but the UDHR does establish worldwide norms for human moral behaviour. GRD is needed to help reduce the massive violations of many people's social and economic rights that continue more than fifty years after the Declaration was signed.

The second reason for a different sort of development is based on the rights of citizens, that is, citizens' relative autonomy vis-à-vis the state; it also presumes the accountability of those in authority to the political community of citizens. Also all citizens must have equal political rights for as Friedmann

(1992:111) said, "citizenship is categorical: one cannot be half a citizen". Certain peoples have been excluded from full citizenship rights such as aboriginal and other ethnic groups, women and peasants.

"Human flourishing" is Friedmann's third justification for an alternative to mainstream development; it connotes human beings living life completely - to their full potential. We may not be wise enough to determine ideal conditions but we are well aware of circumstances that suppress people's flourishing. Such situations include inadequate nutrition, ill health, continual arduous labour, constant threat of eviction, exposure to violence and turbulent social relations. By reducing or removing such conditions, GRD finds validation through enabling people to flourish. In the following subsection I will briefly detail a history of the idea of GRD.

(iv) A History of the Concept of Grassroots Development

Veltmeyer (1997) found one of the earliest expressions of the concept of popular participation in development⁴ in a 1964 study by CEPAL (the Spanish acronym for the United Nations Economic Commission of Latin America). This study considered participation to be necessary for development but it was ignored in the then heyday of a development field swamped by growth and modernization theories. CEPAL did not return to participation as a development approach until the late 1980s.

In the mid-1970s, with much-changed economic circumstances, participation as a development approach resurfaced; the context of development

⁴ In my view, GRD can be substituted for Veltmeyer's participatory development with little or no change in his meaning.

also changed with social concerns such as health, education, social security and welfare (basic needs) becoming part of the package. The main uses of the term 'participation' (or 'participatory development') in that decade were twofold. The mainstream development establishment (including reform-minded liberal intellectuals dominating the development field, governments and international organizations that used their services):

generally took *participation* to mean the incorporation of the intended beneficiaries into the development process... In this intellectual context *development* was (and is) predicated on changing not the system that produces its socioeconomic conditions but changing the positions of women – or of agricultural producers, the urban poor, or other intended beneficiaries of the development process – within the system; to remove any barriers to their equal access or opportunity (Veltmeyer 1997:306; emphasis in original)

The various alternative approaches to development - thrown up in the 1970s – employed participation in a second, very different way, as a source of empowerment "constituting and capacitating the objects of the development process as active subjects, involving them in each and every phase including initial diagnosis and the determination of the community's problems and needs"(Veltmeyer 1997:306).

According to Veltmeyer (1997), in the 1980s and 1990s the various alternative ways of looking at development merged into a movement with recognizable features and principles. These included development as empowerment; the need to go beyond the state, the market and the development agencies to the community – the focus and central instrument of development. Another facet was popular participation as the *sine qua non* of development – its objective, avenue and agency. Development was also seen as participation to be

scaled small and locally-based. Finally, resources were to be more equitably distributed in conjunction with a democratic political system. Authors noted by Veltmeyer (1997) as contributing to the above features and principles were Korten, Friedmann, Goulet, Rahman, Schumacher, Stiefel and Wolfe and Lipton and Max-Neef.

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) arranged and backed a course of international forums and conferences on aspects of participatory development and its implementation from 1979 to 1982 thus engendering the most methodical explication of the idea in that era. Based on the UNRISD supported formulations a growing number of grassroots community-based organizations as well as an international complex of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) cultivated their own versions of grassroots development (Veltmeyer 1997).

In this first section, I have set the stage for a careful examination of the social aspects of GRD which will follow; so far I have briefly described two important paradigms of development, that of things in which development is directed from the top to the bottom and that of people in which development flows from the bottom up. Key characteristics of each approach were compared. Needs for human rights, citizen rights and human flourishing on the part of the southern poor were presented as moral justifications for GRD. Finally, a history of the idea of the paradigm of people from the mid-1960s was sketched.

SECTION TWO: KEY ELEMENTS OF GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT

In this section I will describe the core of the GRD process. The centrality of people to GRD with a constant awareness of local culture and gender relations will be discussed. The main part of the section will concentrate on the three pillars of GRD: participation/collective action, social organization and empowerment. I am simplifying GRD by focusing only on the above elements; the process also involves technology, resources, the political, economic and social climates and international factors. The latter aspects are also of vital importance but, for this paper, I have chosen to concentrate on the social aspects only. I chose to isolate the importance of people being central together with the three pillars because without them no GRD will take place; they are the key social as well as the defining elements of the GRD process.

(i) The Centre of Grassroots Development—the People

As noted already, a grassroots approach to development centres its attention on the local participants – the people as the actors, the agents of their own development. All the critical factors stem from this focus. Not separate constituents, but woven throughout the GRD fabric, are the threads of culture and gender. One might assume that as GRD is intended to empower locals to deal with their issues and problems, their culture would automatically inform the process. But if there are change agents involved they are probably from outside the local area and possibly educated in a western manner or trained by westerners. Also, considering the origin of development ideas and international development agencies it may be wiser to explicitly work toward respect for local

cultures on the part of any personnel and organizations involved. If one accepts Verhelst's (1987:17) definition of culture as "the sum total of the original solutions that a group of human beings invent to adapt to their national and social environment" or my simplified version—how a group of people deal with their situation—then the same author's assertion that culture is the basis of development seems eminently reasonable. Verhelst's declaration (and his definition of culture) is consonant with the whole 'paradigm of people'; if a local group's development is not largely based on its culture it will not thrive. Kleymeyer (1994:34) writing on the same topic notes that he is not trying to romanticize minority cultural groups but that:

the key issue is not *whether* traditional culture should change but *how* minority groups can maintain proprietorship over the forms and content of their own cultural expression and control over how they evolve. Who will manage the process of change? Will it be directed from above or by autonomous subgroups in a society? There is a parallel here with certain tenets of bottom-up development: Ethnic minorities should have a primary role in overseeing the evolution of their cultures, just as they should have a primary role in deciding on developing priorities and strategies and the programs that affect their communities. (emphasis in original)

Participants and any outsiders involved therefore need to ensure that local people determine the manner in which GRD proceeds and changes are made.

A leading theorist and practitioner of GRD asserted that the need for concentration on women cannot be overemphasized "in view of the almost universal phenomenon of male development at the expense of women's development" (Rahman 1995:47). Rahman, in the same article, concedes that cultural and religious beliefs complicate the situation. Nevertheless, movement towards a situation where women are freely able to express their positions

concerning gender relations in all areas and the progression of gender relations towards greater equality as determined by women themselves will ensure women are more central to GRD. In many areas, women will need to form their own independent organizations at the local level (Rahman 1995; Eade and Williams 1995). Brohman (1996:295) found that "...genuine women's empowerment has historically been based on grassroots initiatives that are designed to meet the specific needs and interests of local women themselves".

Participation/collective action, social organization and empowerment are the main pillars of grassroots development; they are embedded in and derive their *raison d'être* from the bedrock of the process – people. These pillars are closely intertwined; people participate collectively to form a social organization and their organized participation leads to their empowerment. I discuss them separately in an attempt to clarify grassroots development ideology.

(ii) Participation/Collective Action

The term 'participation' has been widely used and adopted in the development literature. However, this should not be taken as an indication that the term is used in the same way by all authors and agencies. In fact, the meaning of 'participation' is contested. For example, as noted in the section of the history of the concept, Veltmeyer (1997) discovered two different uses of the term participation. Other development writers have furnished different classification schemes. A World Bank publication describes four methods of participation: information sharing, consultation, decision-making and initiating action (referenced in Lane: 1995). Ghai (1989) and Chambers (1995) each

consider three forms. Ghai (1989) outlines participation as mobilization (people's contributions of labour, materials, etc., as their participation), decentralization in government machinery or related organizations and as a process of empowerment of the deprived and excluded. Chambers (1995) argues that participation can be simply a cosmetic label to improve appearances, secondly as a co-opting practice to mobilize local labour and reduce expenses or it can be a genuinely empowering process in which locals are fully involved in development including making their decisions.

In a somewhat different approach, Oakley and Marsden (in Brohman 1996) placed the different meanings assigned to participation on a continuum; at one end would be voluntary contributions to projects with no local sway over their form and at the other would be a vigorous movement to expand community control. Some rate involvement in development using volition as the criterion. Brohman (1996:252) refers to the United Nations taxonomy of coerced, induced and bottom-up participation; the latter "comes closest to the ideal mode of participation as it reflects voluntary and autonomous action on the part of the people to organize and deal with their problems unaided by governments or other external agencies".

For the purposes of GRD as discussed here, I will use Chamber's third definition of participation. This is the process through which people voluntarily involve and empower themselves by doing their own analysis, taking control, making decisions and acting on them throughout the development cycle. An essential element of GRD which, while perhaps implied in the above definitions

of participation (Eyben and Ladbury 1995), needs to be highlighted. That is, participants acting collectively. Throughout the literature on GRD people working together is presented as *one* indispensable *key*⁵ to southerners taking charge of their lives (see Clark 1991; Esman and Uphoff 1984; Carroll 1992; Edwards and Hulme 1992; Uphoff 1986, 1993; Fisher 1994; Fox 1990, 1996). As Clark (1991) writes, poor people may well be aware of their predicament but as individuals they can do little to improve their situation unless they use their only bargaining power – their unity. Hirschman (1984:97) observed that GRD is essentially collective or communal in nature whereas authoritarian or elitist rulers “depend for their stability and untrammelled authority on the thorough *privatization* of their citizen’s lives” (emphasis in original).

In practice how do people become participants acting in concert in pursuit of development? The initiative may come from outside the group (that is, from catalysts, government agencies, non-government organizations, donors) or from within (Rahman 1993; Uphoff 1991). Uphoff (1991), from his sample of 150 development organizations from around the world, noted that, generally, local organizations established by community members performed better than those initiated by outside agencies. Nevertheless, when government agencies or NGOs employed specially trained catalysts or animators to establish local organizations, results were almost as good as when organizations were initiated from within the community.

⁵ I emphasize these words because I see participants acting collectively as only one factor in grassroots development; it cannot wholly explain successful GRD– as cannot other single factors such as technology, resources or the political climate (Esman and Uphoff 1984; Bebbington 1997).

The voluntary aspect of participation was noted above; due to the extremely hard lives led by many southerners commitment to participating and acting collectively is difficult and time-consuming. As Eyben and Ladbury (1995:193) point out "sustained collective action will only be achieved when beneficiaries perceive that the opportunity cost of their participation is more than offset by the returns". Voluntary commitment to working together is essential for successful GRD. Evidence of this commitment may consist of participants' investment/pooling of scarce cash, labour, materials, right of way, local knowledge, management skills and assumption of responsibility (Uphoff *et al* 1998; see also Brohman 1996). Rahman (1993:150) sums up the confluence of the participation and collective action streams:

what gives real meaning to popular participation is the collective effort of the people concerned in an organized framework to pool their efforts and whatever other resources they decide to pool together, to attain objectives they set for themselves. In this regard participation is viewed as an active process in which the participants take initiatives and take action that is stimulated by their own thinking and deliberation and over which they can exert effective control.

A final aspect of involvement concerns the actual participants. Often, the poorest as well as women in an area will be overlooked and outside catalysts will concentrate on elites and men. As Chambers (1995) observes it is not good enough to concentrate on one group such as women for there are different levels of poverty among women in a locality. The utmost effort needs to be made to reach the poorest of local groups for they are the ones who are often excluded, weak and overworked.

In this subsection, I have examined various interpretations of participation; for GRD, participation/collective action means local people working together and “calling the shots” in their own development. Inherent are two key elements: pooling of their resources and the composition of the developers with respect to gender and class. Through this process participants collectively create social organizations to further their aims.

(iii) Social Organization

As this project is concerned with grassroots development, I will focus on only one type of development structure, namely, grassroots organizations (GROs).⁶ “GROS are locally based groups that work to improve and develop their own communities through communitywide or more-specific memberships, such as women or farmers” (Fisher 1993:5). They are the member-driven organizational heart and soul of grassroots development. Many GROs are based on traditional structures while others were created specifically for development activities. (Edwards and Hulme 1992, Fisher 1994). Case studies describe the “conversion” or utilization of traditional organizations as vehicles for grassroots development (for examples from Ecuador and Brazil see Stanton 1997; Kleymeyer 1994; Costa *et al.* 1997).

GROs have been categorized as multipurpose local development associations(LDAs), interest associations (IAs) such as women’s or water users’

⁶ There is no standardized designation or meaning for the various types of groups; for example Uphoff (1986) calls grassroots organizations local (primary) organizations and includes three levels: the group, the community and the locality levels (the latter refers to a set of communities connected by commercial and cooperative links). Carroll (1992) calls GSOs primary grassroots organizations but he excludes the locality level because it is an aggregation of base groups and therefore is part of the GRSO category which Carroll named grassroots support

groups and co-operatives (co-ops) - including pre-cooperatives such as rotating credit associations or informal work groups. LDAs are multifunctional⁷ as they undertake a wide variety of tasks, for example, supporting education, building roads, assisting agriculture, maintaining places of worship; membership is determined by place of residence.

Co-ops are quite varied with many subtypes; their defining characteristic is the pooling of resources by members. The resources could be capital such as in savings societies or rotating credit associations, labour as in rotating work groups, purchasing power as in consumer co-ops or products as in marketing co-ops. The key difference between LDAs and co-operatives is that the former contribute mostly to public goods available to all in the area of the LDA while benefits from co-ops, for the most part are more private in nature, going directly to members. The defining feature of IAs are the common features of their memberships. People may join together to perform a specific function better such as water management or public health; others may group themselves with reference to some personal characteristic such as gender, ethnicity, religion or economic status so as to pursue a common interest. Usually IAs are less inclusive than LDAs which are encompassing and multipurpose by definition but more so than co-ops for IAs are involved with social as well as economic interests and with public as well as private benefits. (Esman and Uphoff 1984; Fisher 1994; Krishna *et al.* 1997).

organizations/membership support organizations. I will follow Fisher's use of GROs and GRSOs; the content of her groupings parallel Carroll's (1992).

⁷ Co-ops can also, in certain circumstances, be multifunctional as we will see in the latter part of this paper.

Co-operatives, more than the other kinds of GROs, are prone to elite domination and corruption. Often co-operatives exclude poor or landless farmers as well as landed women; wealthier farmer members usually dominate co-ops. Co-ops are more likely to have been established by foreign donors or governments than the other types of GROs; this factor may contribute to the accommodation of local elites and corruption as well as their frequent failure (Fisher 1994; Uphoff 1986). Agricultural co-operatives throughout the world, due to poor maintenance of equipment, inadequate technical assistance and access to credit, are often short lived and fail as economic entities (Fisher 1993). It is therefore not surprising that Esman and Uphoff (1984) found that, as a group, the co-operatives they studied fared considerably less well when rated on their overall performance in development than LDAs and IAs. But Fisher (1994) concluded that the differences between areas with and without functioning GROs are probably far greater than the differences among GROs.

Carroll (1992) in his extensive research in Latin America found organizations' capacity to act, both internally and externally, critical to grassroots development. By internal, Carroll means learning how to manage resources and operate enterprises for collective benefit (self-help); external involves the group learning how to mobilize in order to influence the outside environment (such as government, banks, other power holders), that is, claim-making. Carroll (1992:98-99) observes that "it is less difficult to mobilize for claim-making than for group management, which requires a more sustained activity, many costly member contributions, and complex trade-offs between selfish behaviour and group-

centered behaviour. Also, group management efforts can be jeopardized if internal divisions exist or collective endeavours do not yield expected benefits". Both dimensions require the ability to work effectively as a unit, relate democratically, reach consensus, deal with conflict, minimize corruption and free ridership, as well as build networks.

Esman and Uphoff (1984:53) sum up the value of organizing to local development participants: "organization is the weapon of the weak in their struggle with the strong". A researcher studying in western India (Shah 1995:94) found that "the use of participatory methods to enable development of local institutions is an important first step towards changing power relationships". Whether local development association, interest association or cooperative, grassroots organizations are vehicles through which locals may empower themselves providing the organizations have the requisite internal and external capacities. While noting the many failures of GROs, Fisher (1993:51) found that they are the strongest and broadest part of the organizational pyramid of development and "are also the *sine qua non* of effective and sustainable development".

(iv) Empowerment

Simply put, people actively participating together build an organization; through this process the participants empower themselves and take more control over their lives. Fisher's (1993:166) definition of empowerment jibes with the ideology of GRD: "a process enabling the poor who have been traditionally powerless to become protagonists or subjects of their own and society's

development". In this section, I will discuss several elements involved in locals taking power for themselves: self-reliance, collective decision-making and action, social awareness, skills development, vertical and horizontal links as well as enhanced well-being or in the words of Friedmann (1992) "human flourishing". As participants become self-reliant they are empowered. Growing self-reliance means less dependence on external organizations, gradual withdrawal of external animators or catalysts, increasing control over economic resources and the social environment, possibly provision of credit and establishment of new initiatives (Ghai 1989; Rahman 1993). Solidarity and cohesion in the form of a collective identity may significantly enhance group self-reliance with respect to caring and respect for each other. Solidarity aids forward movement on the part of the group as well as resistance to domination (Rahman 1995; Marsden and Oakley 1995).

Collective or mass decision-making and action is central to participants claiming power over their lives. Locals need to work together to get organized: once organized they need to continue to collectively decide and act. Internal democracy is developed as policies and activities are decided according to the priorities of all and everyone has the opportunity to participate in collective undertakings (Brohman 1996; Rahman 1995; Marsden and Oakley 1995).

Becoming socially aware of their social environment and the power imbalances therein helps disadvantaged participants empower themselves. This awareness is usually arrived at through a collective process of self-enquiry and reflection with or without the aid of external catalysts or animators (Rahman

1993; Rahman 1995; Marsden and Oakley 1995; Brohman 1996). People may also acquire social awareness through participation in events much larger than their local area. For example, in my field sites Varilla Negra and Volcancillo, El Salvador, most co-operative members had laboured as fighters or support workers for the guerrilla movement throughout the 1980s; this experience increased their understanding of the dynamics of the society in which they lived. Rahman (1995) has found that acquiring literacy is usually closely connected to increasing social awareness as learning to read is a source of power in itself; also self-confidence is enhanced when literacy is acquired through a process of self-discovery à la Paulo Frieré.

People also empower themselves by learning new skills and abilities of various kinds: manual, technical, planning, managerial, analytical and reflective (Ghai 1989; Marsden and Oakley 1995; Brohman 1995). Vertical and horizontal links may also be empowering (Uphoff 1991). Although there is a danger of individual grassroots organizations being dominated by higher organizational levels generally unlinked groups operating in isolation are less empowered than those that have connections to other groups (Esman and Uphoff 1984). In smaller groups there is more solidarity, increased ability to mobilize resources based on commitment and more control over free riding. Federations⁸ have the advantages of economic scale, superior vertical linkages and bargaining power (Carroll 1992). Therefore, small GROs benefit from uniting in a larger organization by merging the asset of solidarity with that of scale (Uphoff and

Esman 1984). The same authors found that vertical linkages, such as in a structure with a nested multi-tier organization, contribute significantly to success providing the linkages are reciprocal and equitable. Nevertheless, Uphoff and Esman (1984) also concluded that horizontal links are more important than the vertical ones.

Lastly, I see enhanced well-being or human flourishing as part of the process of people empowering themselves; few writers⁹ mention well-being with reference to empowerment. I include well-being because empowerment can be seen as synonymous with grassroots development¹⁰; if a local group empowers itself it will have more control over decisions made, their own lives as well as local resources and therefore their well-being should be enhanced. A large number of factors could be included under well-being; some key ones are employment/livelihood, nutrition, health related matters: safe water and sanitation, healthy housing and health care and self-esteem (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987; Uphoff *et al.* 1998). Figure 1 graphically summarizes this section of the paper; locals empower themselves by participating collectively to build an organization.

In Section Three, I will describe the three El Salvadoran case studies and evaluate each one in terms of indicators for the three pillars of GRD examined in this section and noted on Figure 1. They are pooling of resources and the nature

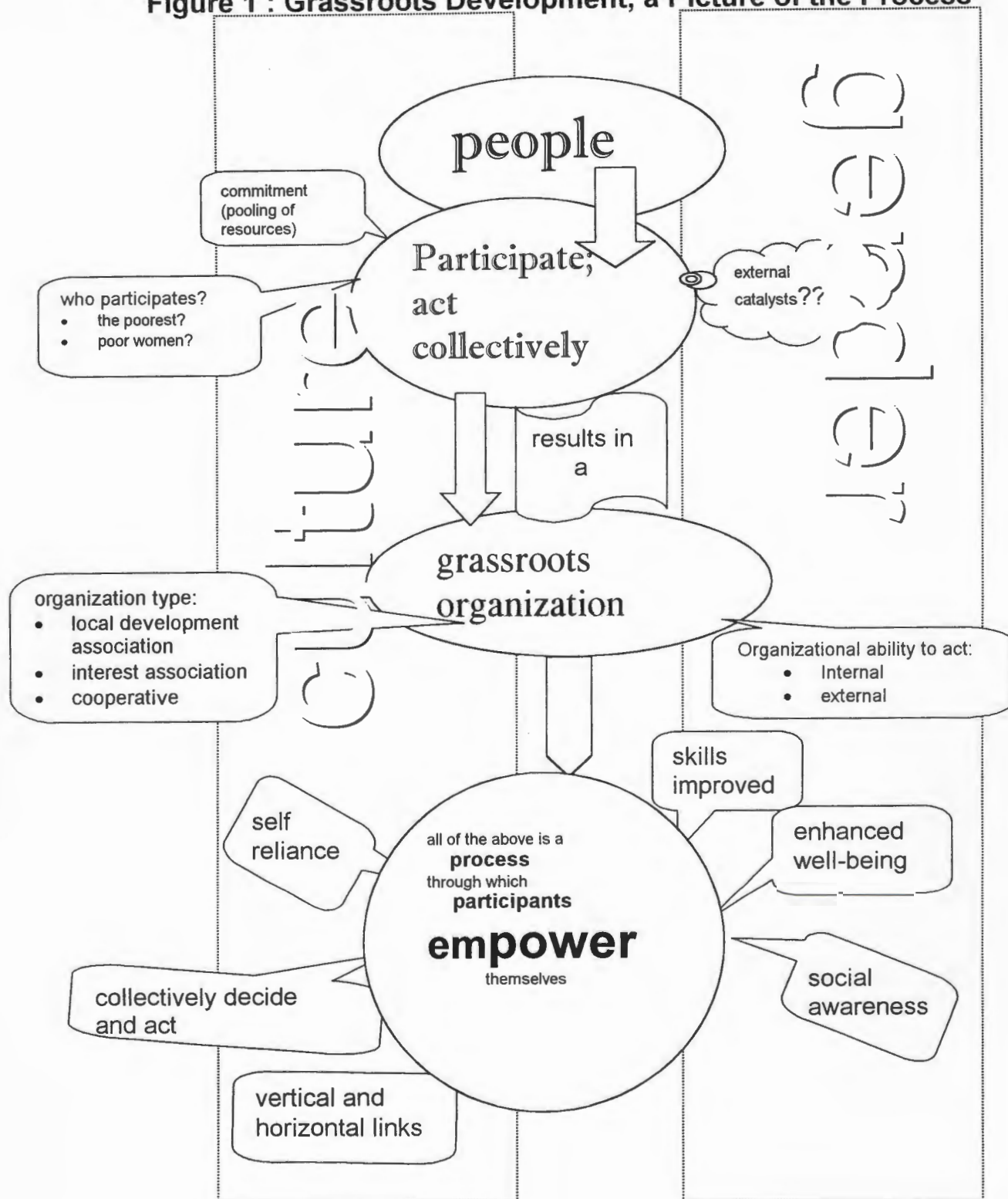
⁸ There are numerous examples of successful federations of cooperatives; for Latin America see Bebbington 1996; 1997; Bebbington & Perreault 1999; Carroll 1992; Bebbington *et al.* 1993 for campesino and campesino indigenous federations.

⁹ Two exceptions: Uphoff *et al.* 1998 suggest that the success of rural development should be evaluated in terms of economic productivity, well-being and empowerment; Marsden and Oakley 1995:61 included "overall improvements in physical wellbeing and security" as one of the areas to act as one basis for qualitative indicators of social development.

of the participants for participation/collective action; organization capacity for grassroots organization and self reliance, improved skills, collective deciding and acting, social awareness, vertical and horizontal links and enhanced well-being for empowerment.

¹⁰ For examples of this usage in the literature see Ghai 1989:218; Brohman 1995:265).

Figure 1 : Grassroots Development, a Picture of the Process



SECTION THREE: EVALUATION OF THE THREE CASE STUDIES

There are definite limitations to this section and my evaluations of the case studies. The cases were not chosen randomly and I do not claim that they are representative of grassroots organizations in El Salvador. Contacts with Salvadoran NGOs were attempted by mail, E-mail and fax in the months before visiting El Salvador in October 1999. The few replies I received were not helpful so I started with contacts supplied by a Salvadoran medical doctor who served with the FMLN in Morazán during the civil war; when his contacts were not available I inquired locally. With blind alleys and travelling I was only able to spend two to three days in each case area. When in the three locations, I depended on interviews with co-op and LDA participants, uninvolved locals if available and outsiders temporarily living there.

(i) The Cases and their situation

Varilla Negra, El Maizal and Volcancillo are settlements in the department of Morazán which is located in northeastern El Salvador, Central America. Although well within tropical latitudes and receiving sufficient rainfall in the wet season, Morazán is one of the poorest of the fourteen departments in the country.¹¹ Its topography (see Appendix 1 for copies of parts of 1:50,000 maps of the case areas¹²) is extremely mountainous. Furthermore it has rocky, thin soil that is much less fertile than that in some of the lowland departments. The main

¹¹ Based on 1997 statistics, El Salvador as whole had a Human Development Index value of 0.674, ranking 107 out of the 174 countries rated; sample statistics also from 1997: 34% without access to safe water; 10.9% not expected to survive to age 40; real GDP per capita, males \$US 4,120, females \$US 1,688; infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births): 1970,105;1997,31 (United Nations Development Programme 1999).

¹² Notice how close together the contour lines are on the map portions indicating steep terrain.

commercial crops are henequen fibre, coffee and timber (Binford 1997); subsistence food crops include corn, beans as well as various vegetables, fruits and coffee.

The three cases, although within 25 kilometres of each other as the crow flies in northern Morazán, do not have equal access to services. Varilla Negra is about an hour and a half walk from the nearest bus service while the others have reasonably frequent public transport nearby. Varilla Negra is without electricity and running water as is El Maizal. All three cases are within 130 kilometres of the capital, San Salvador, but the trip takes more than four hours by bus.

Due to its terrain and relative remoteness as well as the poverty of its inhabitants, in the civil war northern Morazán was the principal rear guard for the Ejército Revolucionario Popular (People's Revolutionary Army-ERP), one of five politico-military groups that made up the FMLN (Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional – Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front). The FMLN fought a guerilla war against the American financed El Salvadoran military and government from 1979 through 1991. Rebel forces controlled the areas in which the three case studies are situated from 1982 on. Local inhabitants participated in many agricultural cooperatives and collectives behind FMLN lines; in 1988 a development organization uniting communities in northern Morazán and parts of the neighbouring department of San Miguel was formed. It was based on a model of participatory democracy and self-management (Binford 1997)¹³.

¹³ By the summer of 1999 this structure had become "a pale shell of what it used to be as an organization" (L. Binford, personal communication, July 27, 1999).

(ii) Varilla Negra

This settlement is scattered widely over steep hillsides in eastern Morazán. Resident *campesinos* (subsistence farmers) have great difficulty eking out a living through subsistence agriculture. Ex-combatants and refugees from the civil war occupied land in Varilla Negra that had been vacated by a wealthy landlord. 31 families compose La Cooperativa Gilberto Urrutia del Caserío El Centro de Varilla Negra (the Gilberto Urrutia Co-operative of the central hamlet of Varilla Negra). The co-operative was established on co-operatively owned land in order to grow organic coffee.

Participation/collective action¹⁴

As a condition of membership in the co-op participants are required to *pool some of their resources*. *Socios* (members) contribute the equivalent of CDN \$6.00 per year as well as their time and work on co-op land. Each *socio* keeps his own record of work contributed on the co-op land; a co-op appointed tabulator also notes each member's work hours. Therefore each member knows approximately how many hours every *socio* works. Time and energy are also pooled in co-op meetings and administration. As to the *nature of participants*, they are all males. One member, reflecting on the lop-sided membership, thought that women could organize their own co-ops. He felt the reason for not including women in this co-op was the excessive *machismo* of the local men. I did not see any evidence of wide differentials of wealth or income in Varilla Negra; they all appeared to have little disposable income.

¹⁴ In this evaluative section, the main elements or criteria of GRD are underlined and their indicators are in lower case italics.

Organizational Capacity

The co-operative as a grassroots organization has shown that it has *internal ability to act* through the effective management of its coffee plantation. This has been accomplished by responsibly organizing its executive board and striking committees for particular tasks. In a short time it has created a co-operative culture that encourages all *socios* to take responsibility for their assigned duties, attend meetings and keep themselves informed of co-op business. Other communities in the municipality are examining the Varilla Negra model with a view to emulating it because of its effectiveness; this is another indication of the co-op's internal success. Arguably the co-op's most important achievement indicating its *external ability to act* was its convincing the land reform bank to allocate it land. The co-op has sought but not succeeded in attracting an infusion of foreign funds that will not be mainly absorbed by national or regional NGOs.

Empowerment

Co-op members seem to be somewhat *self-reliant*. They have had some external assistance consisting of funds to buy coffee plants for the plantation from the US Peace Corps in alliance with a Salvadoran NGO (Greinke: n.d.). This dependence stopped with the provision of seedlings; once planted the NGO office in the town two hours away only wanted a monthly accounting of the number of hours worked by co-op members. As mentioned previously, the co-op wants to attract more funding for various projects but they are, in my view, sufficiently politically and socially aware to avoid major dependency traps.

Solidarity combined with more respect for each other and less propensity to fight to resolve conflicts has enhanced the self-reliance of the co-op. Enhanced earnings (noted below in the part on well-being) has increased the self-reliance of members.

Collective decision making/acting appears to be solidly entrenched in the co-op's culture; decisions based on its statutes and by-laws are made in general assemblies with regular meetings held to review issues members bring forward. Members are notified of meetings; decisions are made on a majority basis (50% plus one). Absent members are informed of outcomes. Committees present full reports of their activity each year. Each member gets a copy of the financial statements. By law, the executive committee must be replaced every two years. My main concern relates to an unofficial co-operative, involving some of the members of the current official co-operative, which failed a few years ago. The reader may recall that co-operatives are the type of GRO most prone to corruption. In this instance, 80 head of cattle were bought and managed by a group of *campesinos*. I was told that six of these men, without the permission of the others, sold the cows, and with the cash bought a car. Some of the group had worked for two years caring for the cattle and received nothing for their efforts. One of the group refused to be part of the coffee co-op due to the alleged scam. I do not think such a swindle could happen with the current organization due to legal safeguards and the two year change in executive rule.¹⁵ I was also told that executives of other co-ops in the department had absconded to the USA with members' money.

The *socios* I interviewed indicated *awareness* of their *social* situation. They were cognizant of the ease with which wealthy landlords have manipulated *campesinos* and blocked the organizing of co-ops. Members also were aware of unjust laws that stopped their progress. Much of the *socios'* social awareness is credited by them to their experience as combatants or support persons for the FMLN in the 1980s. The fallen commander, Gilberto Urrutia, after whom the co-op was named, constantly spoke to his guerrillas about co-ops and collective work.

Socios see the process of initiating and developing their co-op as an education and a general *improvement of their skills*. Specific skills mentioned were working with a group in a collective manner, expressing opinions, being critical in light of self-criticism and organizational skills. Also mentioned was the need to bring in technicians and other experts to teach them skills they are lacking. The Varilla Negra co-op has some *vertical and horizontal links*. It is a member, along with 20 other co-ops, of a Morazán federation of co-operatives and a member of a national confederation of cooperative organizations. A vertical link was mentioned under self-reliance above. Members are reluctant to work with Salvadoran NGOs because they are convinced that funds going to the NGOs are mostly used for modern office equipment and staff vehicles and not to support GROs.

The *well-being* of co-op member and their families has been *enhanced* in several ways. *Socios*, who once worked for the rich at a rate as low as CDN \$.08 per day, now work for themselves earning about CDN \$4.00 per day. Their

¹⁵ The alleged swindlers are not on the coffee co-op's executive now.

concrete block houses are sturdier and safer than former grass and stick huts. They now have better sanitation as they have built proper latrines. After the war people had almost nothing to eat; now they have land on which to grow fruits and vegetables and keep some farm animals. Although members have little cash they consider themselves much better off due to their involvement with the coop; in one *socio's* words:

We are seeing growth. We feel that we are important because we feel that we have a small business. We have changed from insignificant campesinos to people that are looking for a better future. Now we are looking forward to sending our children to continue with their schooling.

(iii) El Maizal

El Maizal, about a four hour walk from Varilla Negra, is a local development association (LDA) of indigenous people, the Cacaopera.¹⁶ The LDA has its roots in traditional collective structures existing in pre-colonial times. Participant families own their land privately but the group works crops collectively. Here, as in the previous case, the people are desperately poor. Twenty families participate in the collective. Its main goals are to revive and propagate Cacaoperan culture¹⁷, encourage the Cacaoperans to develop in various ways and to instill respect for the environment. In El Maizal, much more than the other two cases, their own culture is the basis of their development as Verhelst (1987) argued.

¹⁶ Cacaopera, the name of the indigenous group, is also the name of the small highland town in the centre of the Cacaoperan people's land.

¹⁷ Reviving their culture is an extremely difficult task; the national government does not acknowledge the existence of indigenous people in the country – a large number of natives were massacred in the 1930s, after that most remaining indigenous discarded their native clothing and

Participation/collective action

As members have no money they *pool* what other *resources* they possess, for example, their labour and food that they grow. There does not appear to be significant free riding, for people contribute their labour and agricultural produce as they are able but the benefits, such as any profit are distributed equally. As for the *nature of the participants*, all members of the twenty families are involved with particular attention given to youth.

Organizational Capacity

Internally, this LDA has been *able to act* in support of its artisans and cultivators by providing credit; as a group, members have also helped promote the sale of crafts such as shoulder bags and hammocks produced by their artisans. The organization is reviving the collection and cultivation of local herbs and herbs for medicinal and other purposes; the collective planting and harvesting of henequen¹⁸, a fibrous plant that can be processed into hammocks and other articles, is part of this strategy. Other indigenous communities in the area are creating LDAs modeled after El Maizal.

The LDA has managed to attain some fulfillment by *acting externally*. It has been able to convince the municipal government to collaborate with it to promote artisan collectives and work towards the elimination of “coyotes”, middle men who make excessive markups leaving the producer with next to nothing for

customs so as to blend in; furthermore the Cacaoperan language is extinct according to the Cacaoperan museum curator.

¹⁸ Cacaoperan henequen fields were burned by government troops in the civil war; the fields were in guerrilla controlled zones; henequen takes five years to produce but lasts for 20 or more years. Henequen, a traditional fibre in this area is not as strong as the nylon currently used for similar purposes but it is more suited to the local climate.

his or her labour. The group is also having limited success in gaining government recognition of the Cacaoperans as a people and their rights.

Empowerment

The El Maizal group is self-reliant in that it is not dependent on external organizations. It has recently been negotiating with UNICEF for help in promoting and resolving issues with respect to women and children, and the LDA works with one El Salvadoran NGO. The animator or catalyst that encouraged the development of the collective group is a local man with some university credits who has done this work since the year after the war ended (1993) as a volunteer (he has his own plot of land for food; he lives very simply). Therefore the LDA does not rely on an external catalyst. The group is slowly taking more control over local economic resources through the gradual elimination of middlemen for craft products; it is also securing credit for artisans and cultivators. By collectively cultivating private croplands the members are creating more social capital in the form of solidarity; in this manner they are also increasing their self-sufficiency in food.

Collective decision making/acting is central to this local development association. It is based on a traditional collective structure and members are committed to maintaining its collective nature. This LDA of 20 families is governed by councils; an elder (52 years of age and older) council of 13, a minor council of 9. The elder council usually takes the lead giving guidance to the formation of consensus in the group. The minor council manages public relations. Meetings are held monthly. There is also a spiritual council that deals

with issues of work and spirituality. Decisions are not made unless all members of a council are present. One of the main purposes of the organization is to expand the *social awareness* of its members with respect to their identity, culture and rights. Therefore the group has a team of promoters who do workshops with members to increase their awareness and knowledge. As a collective they are also in contact with other indigenous groups in Central America in order to learn from them and broaden their social awareness. Interviewees indicated they were aware of the extensive abuse of women in El Salvador and were determined to eliminate it in their community through education.

El Maizal participants are *improving their skills* through an active educational program. As young people attend public school which does not promote indigenous values, the LDA works with youth particularly in carpentry, agriculture, the manufacture of organic pesticides and medicine as well as cultural studies. As mentioned before, the local indigenous language is extinct therefore youths cannot learn their ancestors' tongue. Some members attend educational programs in neighbouring countries and then transmit what they have learned from other indigenous to the rest of the LDA.

The group has some *vertical and horizontal links*. No mention was made of a regional or national organization of native peoples in El Salvador that could lobby government; this lack is partially explained by the small number of indigenous groups left in the country. These groups live in small pockets isolated from each other. El Maizal does have extensive (horizontal) contacts with other aboriginal groups in Central and South America. Vertically, links are to the

municipal government and the development organizations mentioned previously. A link which retards the group's development as a collective indigenous community is what one person called trans-culturalization. By that the interviewee meant the influence of local people who have immigrated to the USA¹⁹. The immigrants then return and influence their relatives in the El Maizal area. Members believe this influence is especially negative when the ex-patriots contact local youth.

El Maizal members openly discuss the lack of any significant *enhancement of their collective's well-being*, especially in terms of employment and livelihood. From their efforts and minor successes to date I believe the LDA will eventually secure a better living for their artisans by eliminating the middlemen. Benefits from their work on herbs and plants will also be in the future. Probably the main elevator of wellbeing to date has been their increased awareness of themselves as an indigenous people with definite rights. For the youth, learning new practical skills has improved their self-image.

(iv) Volcancillo

Volcancillo is a coffee co-operative with 24 members located on very rugged countryside in northern Morazán. As in Varilla Negra, the members are poor subsistence farmers; they are mostly ex-guerrillas and support workers for

¹⁹ Many Salvadorans left their country during the war, most going to New York or Los Angeles; their remittances to families at home is a major support for the national economy. In every large and small town in Morazán there are one or more courier businesses that send a person with packages to the USA on request.

the FMLN rebels during the civil war. Land tenure is different from the first case in that the coffee growing land (the *finca*) is not co-operatively owned but everyone has a parcel of about five acres. Some of this land is worked as a group for projects such as for the coffee plantation; therefore the organization is a co-operative of land owners.

Participation/collective action

Volcancillo *socios* (members) *pool their resources* in the form of labour on the coffee land; a record of each person's work input is kept. *Socios* also contribute cash. This takes the form of a small initiation fee plus a monthly contribution of the equivalent of approximately \$CDN 1.67. If a member leaves the co-op, his or her monthly contributions are refunded but the interest on them stays with the group. The co-op's statutes state that a *socio's* benefits are to be in direct proportion to his or her contributions.

In Volcancillo, the *nature of the participants* varies from the other co-op studied. The majority are ex-guerrillas with eight out of the 24 being women. All of them are poor. Several of these women are single; their spouses were killed in the war. They have several children (four to six) each. Women members indicated that they feel positive about their membership in the co-op. They feel free to present motions to the co-op's general assembly and say that they are treated no differently than the male *socios*.

Organizational Capacity

The co-op's *internal ability to act* is indicated by its management of the coffee *finca*, the establishment of the children's wellness center, the provision of

safe, stout housing for its members and the delivery of medical and financial help to ill members. *Externally*, when the co-op was being formed its future members acted to push the government to recognize organized groups of ex-guerrillas and grant them land from the land reform bank. The co-op has been successful in proposing projects to various NGOs for funding and having them approved. Some members believe that the co-op allows them to make national and international contacts that may in turn benefit the organization through publicity and external funding.

Empowerment

Self-reliance: Originally part of a much larger coffee co-operative about 15 kilometres to the north Volcancillo members eventually decided to become a separate co-op. Members feel they have grown stronger as a group as they have worked together dealing with their common problems. Solidarity in the co-op has also been enhanced through the increasing trust members have in each other and their propensity to look out for the best interests of others not just themselves. A factor working against the co-op's self-reliance is their eagerness to seek projects funded by NGOs²⁰. Although projects for specific improvements (such as the children's wellness center, potable water, and electricity) have obviously been a great boon to the *socios* there is a danger that the co-op will come to rely totally on schemes funded externally and thus become less self-reliant.

In order to facilitate *collective decision-making/acting* the coop has an administrative council; its secretary drafts documents from the minutes of the

general assemblies (the highest coop authority) and any petitions presented. Every two weeks this council reviews project objectives and work that needs to be accomplished. Every two months general assemblies of all coop members are held at which reports are presented and decisions taken. Every member has a vote at the assemblies; individuals (including female members) indicate they feel free to present motions to the council which will in turn be entertained at an assembly. The decision-making mechanics differs from Varilla Negra in that, although a majority must be present at an assembly for it to function, the actual decisions are made by consensus, not 50% plus one. All members have access to statements of accounts and other records of the co-op.

As in the first co-op discussed, Volcancillo's *social awareness* stems from the many members living and working together in the FMLN guerrilla organization. One member explained that after the 1992 peace accords were proclaimed people thought about collective work; not being clear about the legalities and administration of a co-operative a group asked for people outside the area to guide them through the co-op formation process. A woman noted that many non-members do not agree with the principles of the co-op and especially dislike women being away from the home to participate in meetings and assemblies. She also felt that she and other female *socios* have enhanced their awareness. In the co-op, women have more freedom to express what they feel and think because of their increased power. Women also have realized the importance of women's organizations in claiming their rights.

²⁰ Volcancillo is legally allowed to have productive projects.

I was not able to glean any detail about *improved skills* of members. Apart from organizational skills, members were vague as to what people actually learned through their co-op involvement. They assured me that whatever these skills were they were being passed on to their children so that they would continue in the coop tradition. The co-op also appears to be weak in *vertical and horizontal links*. It has obvious vertical links with NGOs but apparently little in the way of links with other co-ops in the department or country and with other like-minded organizations in neighbouring nations. Members are aware of this deficiency but gave the impression that they were waiting for researchers and others to come looking for their group.

In terms of *enhanced well-being*, Volcancillo has done exceptionally well in a short time. Most of these enhancements have been mentioned already: children's wellness center for the whole community, permanent adequate housing, electricity distribution, potable water, increased wages due to project work and improved nutrition. Members, especially women, have developed a heightened sense of wellbeing through newly attained power as full-fledged co-op members to whom others listen.

Table 2 below summarizes the case studies described above. All the criteria, are rated on a four point scale: 0 = not evident; 1 = evident but weak; 2 = evident and strong; 3 = evident and extremely strong. The ratings are subjective as they were determined by the author based on information gleaned through interviews with programme participants and others.

TABLE 2:THE CASE STUDIES: CRITERIA AND INDICATORS

(CRITERIA IN UPPER CASE, indicators for criteria in lower case)

Locations⇒⇒⇒⇒ in Morazán, El Salvador	Varilla Negra	El Maizal	Volcancillo
PARTICIPATION/ COLLECTIVE ACTION			
1. pooling of resources	3	3	3
2. inclusive nature of participant group	1	3	2
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY			
1. internal ability to act	3	3	3
2. external ability to act	1	2	2
EMPOWERMENT			
1. self-reliance	2	3	1
2. collective decision- making/acting	3	3	3
3. social awareness	2	3	3
4. improved skills	1	3	0
5. links: vertical and horizontal	2	2	1
6. enhanced wellbeing	2	1	3
Total Points	20/31	26/31	21/31

(v). Comparing the Case Studies

The three GROs are rated the same in three out of the ten indicators: pooling of resources, internal capacity to act and collective decision-making/acting – one indicator from each of the three categories used. All the scores were 3's (evident and extremely strong). There were no indicators on which all three GROs scored on the lowest or next to lowest value on the scale; there was only one score of 0 (not evident) for any of the ten indicators. On four indicators, two of the three GROs received the same score; for the remaining four all the scores were different.

The indicators on which all GROs scored the same

In the section on organizations, pooling of resources by members was noted as the defining characteristic of co-operatives. Therefore the 3 rating for Varilla Negra and Volcancillo simply affirms that they are functioning as co-operatives; if there was no evidence of pooling they would be co-operatives only in name. El Maizal participants pool their labour and food. Their practice indicates they are following a traditional *modus operandi* of their forefathers.

Internal ability to act is an area on which one would expect GROs to focus their collective energy. Why participate together if not so that resources could be managed and enterprises operated for collective benefit? Therefore it is not surprising that these GROs all are doing well in this respect; after some years if a GRO was doing poorly in this area it could not be considered successful in GRD.

Collective decision-making is also vital if the GROs are to continue to be people-centered. The lack of evidence of elite domination and the openness of

the decision-making and governing process is a good sign of GRD in progress. That all three GROs have institutionalized collective decision-making/action is evidence that participants are empowering themselves. As Lane (1995:191) argues "the only way to ensure that individuals have the power to attack the root causes of underdevelopment is to enable them to influence all decisions, at all levels, that affect their lives".

Thus, the three GROs examined all score high in terms of pooling of resources, internal ability to act and collective decision-making/acting. Note that all three broader criteria (PARTICIPATION/COLLECTIVE ACTION, ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND EMPOWERMENT) are represented by the above indicators. The importance of all the groups scoring high on these three is emphasized by the centrality of the indicators to the criteria. These indicators, if not the most important for each of the three pillars of GRD, are definitely essential for GRD to proceed. Therefore by achieving high levels of pooling, internal management of resources and collective-decision-making/acting, Varilla Negra, El Maizal and Volcancillo have all made a good start on the GRD path.

Other indicators

I do not find that the pattern of scores on the other seven indicators reveals a clear pattern. In the three indicators on which two out of three groups had the same mark, there is no consistent pattern although in each instance the LDA was paired with one or other of the co-ops. For example, for external ability to act and social awareness, El Maizal, the LDA, had the same score as

Volcancillo; for links, horizontal and vertical the LDA attained the same mark as Varilla Negra. On four indicators all GROs received different scores.

Overall scores

Overall, the LDA (El Maizal) fared better with the two co-ops receiving almost identical total marks. This is in agreement with Esman and Uphoff (1984) that LDAs and IAs generally do better overall than co-ops. Looking more closely at the scores, the LDA not only scored high overall but also in each of the criteria (PARTICIPATION/COLLECTIVE ACTION, ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND EMPOWERMENT), especially in the empowerment area (15/18 compared to Varilla Negra with 12/18 and Volcancillo with 11/18).

Why did the LDA studied do substantially better on the indicators for the key elements of GRD than the two coops? Perhaps it relates to the basis of the LDA – that is, a traditional organization with participants committed more completely to the group in a quest for cultural and spiritual awakening as well as enhanced crops and crafts. Another factor may be the inclusiveness of the El Maizal group; all Cacoperan indigenous in the area, women, men and children participate whereas in Varilla Negra only men are involved and in Volcancillo only a third of co-op members are women. In order to test Esman and Uphoff's 1984 conclusion that co-ops do less well overall than LDAs and IAs it would be necessary to undertake a much broader comparative study of the three types of GROs.

One could argue that, although the LDA rated higher than the co-ops on most indicators, it scored lowest on the one that matters most – enhanced well-

being or human flourishing and therefore is not doing GRD as well as the co-ops. Perhaps many participants in the three GROs would agree. In response, I would point to the number of indicators for empowerment; enhanced well-being is one of six. If GRD is about people taking more control of their lives, then I believe the four empowerment indicators on which El Maizal scored well (self-reliance, collective decision-making/acting, social awareness and improved skills) show that the participants in the LDA are actively involved in grassroots development. Enhanced well-being, although extremely important to participants in their daily lives, is not the sole or most important bench mark of successful grassroots development.

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

In general, the three cases examined in northeastern El Salvador confirm what the literature outlines as the process of grassroots development. That is, people as the main actors participating collectively to create an organization so as to empower themselves. Varilla Negra, El Maizal and Volcancillo were all centered on the participants acting in concert; without collective action there would not have been any empowerment and consequently, no development. All three GROs did well in terms of three grassroots development indicators: pooling resources (an indicator of participation/collective action), internal ability to act/manage resources (an indicator of organizational capacity) and collective decision-making/acting (an indicator of empowerment).

There are several points of interest from these cases for the study of GRD, most of which are generalizable to other southern locations.

Collective action does not necessarily improve living standards (well-being) quickly. The well-being of the members of the co-ops (especially Volcancillo) has been enhanced in a few short years but the El Maizal participants had seen little material improvement even though their organization had been operating longer than the other two. In my view, there is no question that the LDA people are participating collectively and taking more control over their lives. I believe living standards will gradually rise. The extended time before improvement is due, at least partially, to the fact that they choose not to rely extensively on external organizations. At least in this small sample, co-operatives produced gains in members' well-being for their members sooner than did the LDA.

Some of the findings on GROs cited in the section on social organizations were borne out by this study. Specifically, the LDA (El Maizal), based on a traditional organization, did considerably better overall than the two co-operatives; this was especially marked in the indicators for empowerment. This result corresponds to research undertaken in the early 1980s. Co-operatives have been found in the past to be more prone to elite domination and corruption than the other types of GROs. I found no sign of elite domination but corruption did rear its head in a precursor to the Varilla Negra co-op. Nevertheless the co-op is now doing well. Much may depend on the members, the particular jurisdiction and the laws regarding co-ops. I believe the rules need to be very strict to avoid malfeasance and elite domination. Co-ops seem to work well

when the group is homogenous with respect to economic and social status as was the case with the two co-ops studied.

The co-operative vehicle may be converted by its members into a multi-purpose organization in order to further enhance their well-being. Volcancillo participants, in a short time, have become extremely adept at what I call the NGO project game. Although established as a coffee co-op the group has managed to attract NGO funds to establish electricity distribution, potable water, decent housing, a children's wellness centre and proper latrines. Most projects also allow for wage employment for members. As with any good thing, the co-op members need to be aware of the possible negative consequences; that is, they need to be ever watchful that they do not fall into the NGO project trap by doing projects just for the money and not necessarily for some real need or desire in their community. Overdependence on NGO project funding could also culminate in the co-op members losing control of their own development.

The multipurpose, encompassing nature of LDAs noted in the published research was confirmed by El Maizal's practices; its members are involved in activities including education, cultural revitalization, crop enhancement, saving plants, improving the lot of craftspeople as well as craft production and negotiations with municipal authorities. All three GROs would do well to intensify their external links, especially the horizontal ones in order to exchange ideas, garner support and work together. This expansion would probably enhance their external ability to act with respect to government, banks and other institutions.

Some fortune may come from misfortune. From members' accounts in the two co-ops, participants learned from their involvement in the civil war as guerrillas and support persons. That experience heightened their social awareness and appeared to prepare them to work together as a co-operative. I would think there are other wars or disasters that do not engender social awareness but, in this part of El Salvador, people's experience in the conflict assisted co-op formation.

As grassroots development is all about disadvantaged people taking more control over their lives, I believe one of the most important learnings from the three case studies is that the local group must always be in control. Much development has been dictated by large foreign aid agencies, national and regional NGOs. In Morazán, El Salvador, three groups of poor *campesinos* with little outside assistance managed to organize themselves with differing objectives. In different ways they seem to be developing and improving their lives, if slowly. As of October 1999 they appeared to be in control of their own agenda. There has been, as Viswanath (1991:5) put it, an "increase in the capacity of disadvantaged individuals to take control of their lives" in Varilla Negra, El Maizal and Volcancillo. Even though only a tiny part of the big picture, this is grassroots development and people are in the centre of it.

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